WHISPER™ THE WINGED UNICORN *in* McClure

A WISH FOR WHISPER

12 COLLECTOR STICKERS INSIDE

Story by Christopher Brown • Illustrated by Katherine Wilson-Heaney

WHISPER™

The Winged Unicorn
in

A WISH FOR WHISPER

Story by Christopher Brown

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All summer long Whisper the Winged Unicorn had practiced her flying. She had become so skilled that she was no longer afraid to soar with the birds. The sky over Rainbow Forest was now her second home, a home with a view more magnificent than any other in the world. Endless woodland, glittering lakes, and rushing rivers stretched as far as she could see. Whisper knew all the secrets of the forest, all the hidden places unseen from the ground. The approach of autumn was changing the leaves into a colorful quilt that spread across the land below her. It was beautiful! But Whisper was used to it all. She was beginning to find the freedom of flight a little boring.

"I wish there was something else to do," she sighed. "I'm glad I can fly, but that's not enough. I want to learn other things."

Suddenly Whisper noticed a flock of geese coming up behind her. Their powerful wings beat in unison, and their long graceful necks pointed straight south.

"Hello!" called Whisper.

"Hello," returned the leader of the geese. "Are you flying south, too?"

"No," answered Whisper sadly. "But I wish I were. It would be nice to see other parts of the world."

"Yes, but it would be just as nice to stay in one place. We geese must fly with the sun, summer and winter. It gets very tiresome. Be glad you have a home in Rainbow Forest. Having a home is a wonderful thing. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" called Whisper as the geese flew away.

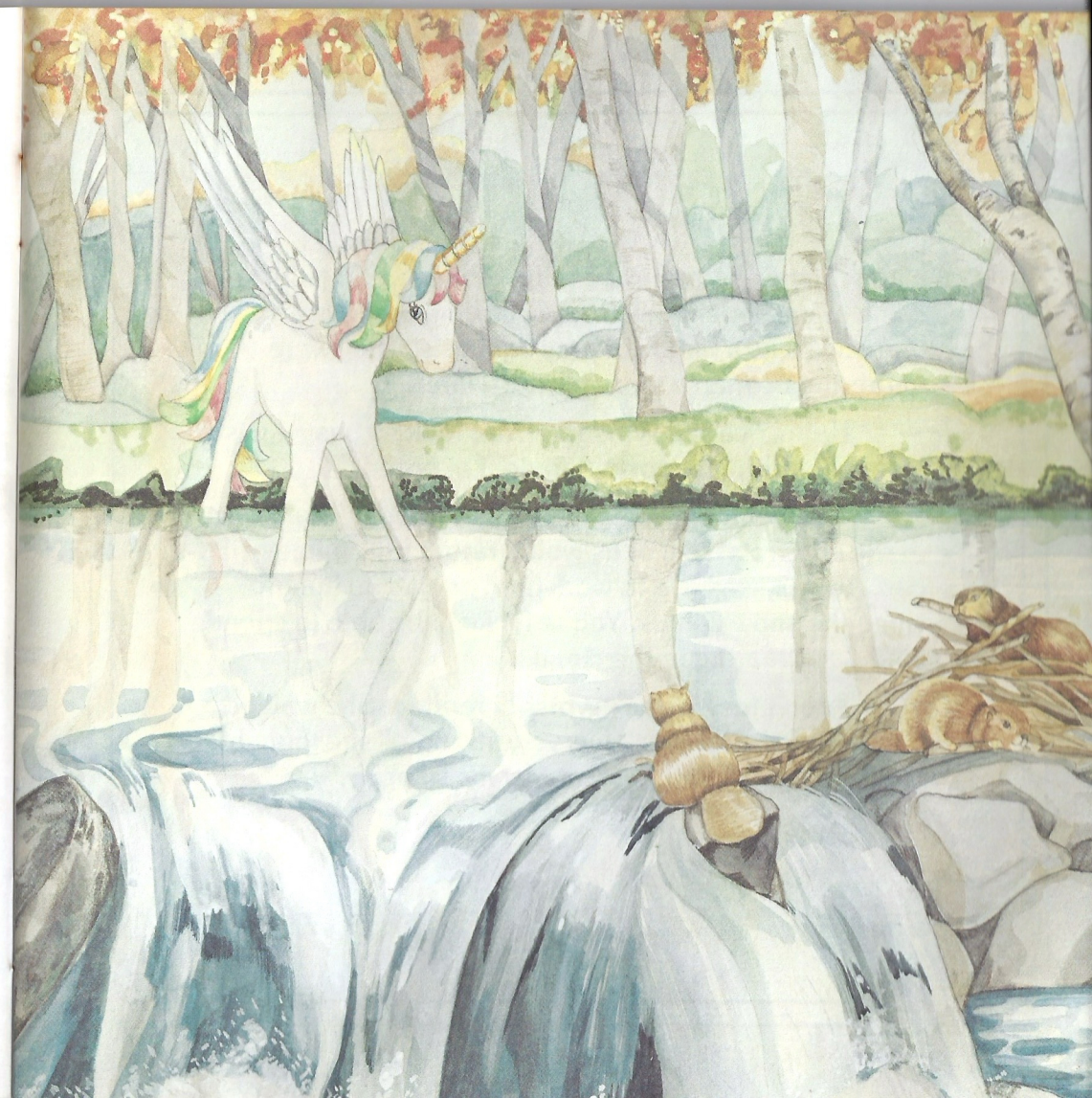
Whisper swooped low over the forest. Seeing a quiet pond, she settled into the soft grass on the bank. Nearby were two shiny-coated beavers hard at work repairing their lodge. It was the lodge, blocking a small stream, that had formed the pond.

"My, what a wonderful house you have!" exclaimed Whisper. "I wish I had a house of my own."

"You wouldn't if you had to fix it every day," grumbled one of the beavers. "The rushing water tears up everything we do. Why, I've a good mind to let the place wash away. We could move to the desert where there's neither tree nor stream."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," said Whisper. "You're so good at building. And your pond is beautiful."

"Bah!" said the beaver. "Beautiful or not, it's just a lot of work!"



Whisper followed the edge of the stream until she came to an ancient oak tree. Scurrying along its branches was a family of gray squirrels. They were gathering acorns to store for the winter.

"Hello," called Whisper. "You look so busy. I wish I had something important to do. I'm bored."

"You wouldn't wish it if you had to do it," said one of the squirrels. "All of us would rather play games all day. As it is, we have to work hard or else go hungry when the snow comes. You're lucky to be able to spend your days soaring in the clouds."

"I don't feel lucky," Whisper replied. She walked on through the forest. "How very strange," she thought. "I haven't met a single creature who's happy."

Soon Whisper came to an open meadow. The sunlit fields were carpeted with millions of flowers. Their faces were bright, each one different from the next.

"You're all so beautiful," cried Whisper.

"That's very nice to hear," said the flowers. Their voices sounded like the lazy humming of a beehive.

"Don't you get bored staying in one place day after day?" asked Whisper.

"Bored?" the flowers replied. "No. This is what we do best. We cheer up the landscape. Isn't that something special?"

"But nothing ever happens to you. It's always the same."

"Nothing is ever the same," the flowers said. "Every day the wind changes. Every day the light changes. Every day we change, too. Our lives are far from boring."

Whisper wandered back into the forest. She felt sad and confused.

"How can the flowers find happiness in doing nothing, while the geese, the beavers, and the squirrels find unhappiness in being so busy? The flowers should be bored, but they aren't. The animals shouldn't be bored, but they are. I don't understand."

Suddenly from the other side of the stream came a rustling noise. Whisper took a step backward. A large dark shape reared up through the trees.

"You cannot learn anything by complaining," a deep voice said. "The answers to your questions can be found only if you search for them."

"Dorian!" cried Whisper, recognizing her friend the dragon. "You surprised me. For someone so large, you move very quietly."

Dorian smiled. "Creatures who make a great deal of noise never hear what's going on around them. Fortunately I was quiet enough to hear your complaints."

"But, Dorian, aren't you ever bored?" Whisper asked.

"Hardly ever. Like the flowers, I notice the changes in the world and in myself. That's never boring. What makes life interesting is a mystery each of us must solve. I can only suggest to you a place to begin your search. Go to the Wishing Pool in the middle of the forest."

Whisper did as Dorian the Dragon suggested. But as she walked along she said, "I wish my friend would tell me the answer sometimes. That would be much easier than finding out for myself."

Whisper arrived at the Wishing Pool just as evening was coming on. The pool's clear water reflected the colorful sunset. Birds sang sleepily. Crickets and frogs began to chirp.

"I wish I knew why Dorian sent me here," said Whisper. "I don't see anything that looks like a cure for boredom."

"Look closely at the Wishing Pool," said a voice from the water.

Whisper bent her head. All she could see was her own image mirrored in the water. "There aren't any answers here," she grumbled. "I'll never understand anything!"

Suddenly the surface of the pool swirled and a goldfish appeared. "This pool is filled with the tears of wishful thinkers," the goldfish said. " 'I wish I could do this, I wish I had that. Boo hoo!' It's very tiresome. The answer to your question is before you. Look more closely!"

Whisper bent nearer the water. Still, the only thing she saw was her own reflection.

"What is it you're looking for?" demanded the goldfish impatiently.

"An answer," replied Whisper. "There's nothing here—Oh!" She stared again at her reflection. The goldfish swirled in the middle of it. "The answer *is* my reflection!"

"That's right," said the goldfish with a smile. "If your life is boring, it's up to you to change it. Only you can make your life important."

"But what about the geese and the beavers and the squirrels?" asked Whisper.

"They have yet to learn the lesson. The flowers, however, understand the magic of being alive. They accept their role in the world and try hard to be the best flowers they can be. They bring joy to all of us. You must use your gifts to the fullest, too."

"But my gift is the gift of flight," said Whisper.

"Not the only gift," replied the goldfish. "The greatest gift is the gift of *feeling*. It's not what you do that counts as much as what you are. Having a skill is unimportant unless you use that skill to improve yourself and others."

"I wish I could help others, but what can I do?"

The goldfish swirled again. "Don't ask me! You decide."

Whisper looked up from the pool into the moonlit sky. Suddenly she understood how to end her boredom. "There are oak trees all over Rainbow Forest. I can fly quickly and gather acorns for the squirrels. If I can gather enough, the squirrels will have time to enjoy themselves more."

"That's the idea," said the goldfish.

"And I can gather twigs and branches for the beavers. Sharing their work will be fun."

"That's it exactly!" exclaimed the goldfish. "Your gift of flight will be more wonderful still if you use it to make a better world. Thinking of others is a sign of growing up. I'm proud of you."

"Thank you," said Whisper. "You know, maybe all the forest creatures could work together to make a home in Rainbow Forest for the geese, too. If they have food and shelter, they can stay here during the winter. They'd have a home!"

"What a splendid idea!" cried the goldfish. "But it's all up to you. If the forest creatures learn to work together, this really will be a magical place. You can make it happen."

"I know I can," agreed Whisper. "Excuse me, now. I've got important things to do!" Whisper spread her downy wings and flew off into the twilight.

"I wish you well," called the goldfish.

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